




THE
QUEST • OF
MERLIN
RICHARD • BOVEY

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LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE
A POEM IN DRAMAS

I. THE QUEST OF MERLIN

BY RICHARD HOVEY

LAUNCELOT AND GUENEVERE

A POEM IN DRAMAS

- I. THE QUEST OF MERLIN
A Masque
- II. THE MARRIAGE OF GUENEVERE
A Tragedy
- III. THE BIRTH OF GALAHAD
A Romantic Drama
- IV. TALIESIN
A Masque
- V. THE HOLY GRAAL AND OTHER
FRAGMENTS

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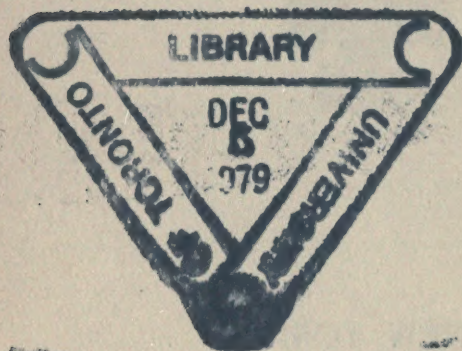
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THE QUEST OF MERLIN



A MASQUE

PERSONS.

MERLIN.

Beneath Hecla.

URD

VERDANDE

SKULD

} *The Norns.*

In Avalon.

ARGENTE.

NIMUE.

Eight other Maidens.

Sylphs.

Gnomes.

Naiads.

Dryads.

PAN.

BACCHUS.

Fauns.

Satyrs.

Maenads and Bassarids.

MAB.

PUCK.

OBERON.

TITANIA.

ARIEL.

Fairies.

Elves.

Goblins.

APHRODITE.

The Loves.

The Valkyrs.

The Angels.

THE QUEST OF MERLIN.

Interior of a cavern in the bowels of the earth, beneath Mount Hecla. Huge rock-fragments, amid which twists tortuously a great root of the tree Yggdrasil. A flickering flame, by the light of which are seen the NORNs, colossal but shadowy shapes, about a gigantic but indistinct Loom. Dull, heavy sounds, out of which arises a strange music, which resolves itself continually into imperfect harmonies, which leave the heart in unrest. A sense of striving and struggle beats through the music.

THE NORNs. We are the Recorders !
We are the Finishers !
Nothing we initiate ;
All things we fulfil.
Odin initiates
And Freyja and Loki,

Divine Balder and the other Immortals.
Whatsoever they begin,
Relentlessly we fulfil.

Ye, too, O men, are as gods ;
Ye are free and the free create ;
Ye have part in the Imperishable.
Ever as ye follow the Beautiful,
Shall the worm transfigure itself
And the new-born god appear.
But over your destinies we sit in doom ;
Whatsoever ye begin,
Relentlessly we fulfil.

Think and we seize the thought ;
Act and the deed once done
Sinks into our iron hands.
Only the unthought thought, O man,
Is thine own and the deed forborne.
Thou canst neither love nor doubt
But the doubt and the love alike
Pass into the infrangible web of the world
That we weave with inexorable fingers.

We are the Queens of Time,
And, while Time is, we endure.
With the calm of the Empyrean
We mix not, neither dwell we therein ;
But over the shifting
Our shuttles are inflexible.
God having given us Time,
Over Time we are greater than God.
We are the Finishers.

[A low, foreboding roll of thunder.—MERLIN appears on a jutting crag in the cave, with a forked wand in his hand.—The flame flashes into sudden brilliancy, sharply defining the rocky walls of the cavern, but at once sinks back into its former weak and flickering indistinctness.—The NORNs remain motionless, noting none of these things, nor do they actually perceive MERLIN at any time.]

MERLIN. Hail !
Ye monstrous Glooms !
Formless Forms !
Known and Unknown !

To what avail
Through strifes and storms,
Athwart the Sea that bellows and booms
In the ear
With the threatening of dire dooms,
Strove I once alone.
In the starless vast of the night of fear,
Dread Queens, to behold your throne?
Lo, all that passes
From your touch takes shape, *so*
Yet in you I find not any shape at all.
Dimly the dusk glasses
To the view
Shadows that fall
Into the Void ; the Verities escape.
Without you seeing is not nor thought,
But you—
Woe ! I discern you not.

URD. Sisters, how should a man's eyes see the
Void ?

VERDANDE. Shadows of clouds he scans on a
searchless sea.

SKULD. Between two Deeps a film of mist that
shifts !

MERLIN. Shadowy ones !
Ye whom my eyes have seemed to see
Many times in the weary years !
Deeper and darker the riddle appears ;
Muddier the river runs.
What are ye, Darknesses ? Whence have ye risen ?
Are ye or seem ye ? What is it to seem or to be ?
With the same awe I re-behold you
As when I first clave o'er the unroadwayed sea
And through the cavernous darks of Hecla's womb
The way to Odin's tomb—
To your earth-bound prison.

VERDANDE. The shuttle flies. The noise of men
far off
Breaks faintly on our ears like distant surf.

MERLIN. Prison, I call it, I hold you—
You, the Resistless, Monarchs of Days—
As verily slaves as we.

Slaves of the stone sceptre your own hands wield
Over the weirds of the world—
Or of some mightier Silence whose ways
I find not without me revealed
Nor within me enfurled.

URD. I hear a voice above the noise of men,
Like a bird's thin shriek shrilling o'er the surf.

MERLIN. Ever thus !
I pass and return,
But ye remain ever the same.
I see the weft wax and the pale flame burn ;
I hear dark words and ominous :
But never to me ye turn ;
Me ye call not by name.

SKULD. The surf booms on, the billows break and
cease,
And the gull's cry dissolves into the wind.

MERLIN. Answer my thought !
Ye have answered before,—
So mightily wrought
My strenuous lore.

By the wand in my hand
I command you to show 100
All the veils may conceal,
That it ails me to know.
Man and wife, is it weal?
Man and wife, is it woe?
Ye see not the wand;
Ye see not the mage:
As two straws in your hand
Are the fool and the sage.
Ye know not I utter;
Ye know not ye heed;
But the words that ye mutter
Shall answer my need.
Speak!

VERDANDE. Woe to the maiden, for her doom is
dark!

SKULD. Woe to the knight! His thread is stained
with blood.

URD. Woe to the Prince! For a witless fault
great woe!

MERLIN. Alas ! for all mortals
Sorrow sits waiting.
Man, hesitating,
Into the Future peers.
From the dark portals
Issue the Fears.

VERDANDE. Weal for the lovers, after many days !

URD. Ay, but they first shall sail a bitter sea !

SKULD. Weal for the King, but not till the kingdom pass !

MERLIN. Weal and woe !
A dark saying !
Yeaing and naying !
How shall I know ?

URD. The seer and the seeing and the seen—
Are not these three things known and yet unknown ?

VERDANDE. To live is better far than not to
live—
Yea, and to live is worse than not to live.

SKULD. The womb—the tomb—and each of these
is all—

And he that acts, is wise and is unwise.

MERLIN. A womb and a tomb !
No more ?

VERDANDE. Who weds this woman hath a royal
wife.

URD. Behold the man she loves, a king of men !

SKULD. Each man must choose his wife and bide
his lot.

MERLIN. She loves the Prince !—
A queenly one !—
Whom else should he wed ?
Who else should share his throne ?
Daughters of Time ! ye speak and convince.
I have chosen a way to tread.

URD. Marriage the calm gods give, a crown of
life ;
Marriage we give, not they, a kissing curse.

MERLIN. A rhymeless Rune—

Is and Is Not.

157.

Solve me the riddle !

Is there no overword ?

VERDANDE. Darkness and light ring round the
globe of things,

And each pursues the other as it flies.

MERLIN. Know ye the wand ?

With the wand I compel you.

SKULD. A Dragon slaying forever a deathless
Queen !

There is no wit in us to make this clear.

MERLIN. Not in you ?

Where then ? In myself ?

[He strikes his own forehead with the wand.—

A black formless mark appears on his brow.

—He falls in a swoon.]

THE NORNS. Over the Loom

Brooding and bending,

Weave we the ending,

Self-decreed doom,
A robe for repayment.

Hands from the Nowhere
Reach the threads here to us.
Hands only appear to us.
Knowing not the Living Ones,
Weave we their raiment.

He who beholds us,
Seeing no others
Timeless and Free,
Knows us and knows us not—
But finds not the Mothers.

Into the void deeps,
Blackness of Darkness
Above and about him,
Dizzily down
Falls he forever.

[As the NORNS sing, the scene becomes more and more indistinct, until, at the last stanza, their words issue from utter darkness.—A confused sound, like a low rumbling. Then

a clear tenor voice is heard singing: "Non-ne anima plus est quam esca; et corpus plus quam vestimentum?"—A ray of light breaks through the darkness, and now the song of the SYLPHS is heard. The light grows brighter, until, when the SYLPHS cease singing, the scene is completely illuminated.—It is a grove, with a Greek temple in the background. MERLIN lies, still in his swoon, upon the ground.—The NORNS have disappeared, and beautiful figures, in classic drapery, pass in and out among the trees.]

SYLPHS. The fleet wind's footing

Is light on the roses.

Wherever he goes is

The lilt of his luting,

Sweet, sweet.

The little green apples

He sways and swings.

The leaves are a-quiver,

Touched by his wings.

The cheek of the river
Dimples and dapples,—
Sweet, sweet.

The light mist-wreathing
Is drifted and thinned.
The lark flies flinging
His song on the wind.
The wind with his singing
Mingles its breathing,— ~~20~~
Sweet, sweet.

There is no one wisteth
The way that it goeth.
The wind bloweth
Whither it listeth,——
Sweet, sweet.

GNOMES [*beneath, unseen*]. Ho, ho ! Ho, ho !
In the earth below,
Like worms that coil
In a slow turmoil,
We huddle and struggle
And delve and toil.

Ho, ho ! Ho, ho !

Merrily O !

Under the ground,

Clogged and bound,

We strive and strain

To be rid of the chain,

As a caged beast rages

To roam again.

Ho, ho ! Ho, ho !

For the brooks to flow !

Hear ye us ? Hark !

We're at work in the dark,

And in and out

We burrow about

Amid caves and graves

With a song and shout—

Ho, ho ! Ho, ho !

For the trees to grow !

The old earth

Hears our mirth

As a thing astir

In the womb of her,

A boding of birth
And a harbinger.

Ho, ho! Ho, ho!
For the flowers to blow!

NAIADS [*in a stream in the background*]. Maiden-
ly strong,
With a joyous song,
Very merry is the river as it ripples along.
The vales are voicing
A great rejoicing;
Earth laughs with flowers as the sky with morn,
For a child is born,
For a child is born.
Sing softly.

From sky and earth
Is the river's birth—
O the gentle joy of the river's mirth! 250
There is never a staying
In all its playing—
Waylaying and straying from morn to morn—
For a child is born,
For a child is born.
Sing softly.

Who knows—who knows

Why the river flows ?

Coming and going—what comes and goes ?

There is no resting

In all its hasting.

What is it that ripples and leaps along

With a glad, sweet song,

With a ceaseless song ?

Sing softly.

ANGELS [*above, in a burst of sunlight*].

Glory to God in the highest !

Osanna ! Osanna !

Behold, His dwelling is the Sun

And the glory thereof His open doors.

He and the blue of heaven are one

And the Sea's dædal-paven floors.

He is the Beholden ;

With Him to be is to be seen ;

Without Him spring were never green

Nor autumn golden ;

By Him the nerves of sight are stirred ;


Beside Him there is nought but Night ;

He uttereth His eternal word,

“Let there be light,” and there is light.
Glory to God in the highest !
Osanna ! Osanna !

[*The ANGELS disappear, soaring upward ; the
NAIADS sink under the waters ; and the
SYLPHS fade into the air.*]

MERLIN [*awakening*]. Sweet goddess, raise thy
veil ! . . . A dream, a dream !
Methought that I was in the utter night.
So black it was, sight was not, nay, nor thought—
Only a sense of falling. Suddenly
A great light shone about me and a form,
As of a potent goddess, moved across
The circle of my sight. Queen-like, she wore
A threefold crown, and in her hand she kept
A mirror wherein, wonderfully glassed,
Meseemed I saw the mystery of things—
Wried in a sort but rimmed about with wonder.
And by her side there crawled a shackled slave
That kissed the mirror. From her head there fell
A veil that clad whatever form she bore
In awful folds, so that I could not see

If she were fair or foul. Yet from her gait
A sound came singing, as it were the voice
Of many dulcimers. Whereat I cried 
Aloud and woke. . . What vale is this? The leaves
Show not the tiniest mote-fleck of decay.
Each little grass-blade—ay, the very mushrooms,
Perfect as in a poet's thought of them !
My boyhood's dream of what the world might be !
Ah me ! I dream still. This is a sweet nothing—
The phantasmagory of a thought-crazed brain.
I am too old to cheat myself with dreams.
I have dropped my plummet into the great deeps,
But nowhere found I this. It is a dream. . .
What eyes are those that peer between the leaves
With laughter in their looking ? Do I see
Or do I dream I see brown beautiful arms
And breasts half-hidden by the russet gown,
A-shift like jack-a-lanterns in the trees ?

DRYADS [*half-seen in the trees*].

See the queer old fellow
With the moss-gray beard !
His eyes are bleared
And his skin is yellow.

Prying and peering—

Hist! hark!

He can hardly see,

For his eyes grow dark ;

And the voice of a tree

Is too fine for his hearing.

For him, when blossoms are blowing,

No fruitage appears.

Deaf are his ears

To the music of growing.

The leaf in the flower,

The flower in the fruit,

The fruit in the seed

And the seed in the root !

There is only the need

Of the eye and the hour.

Come and catch us, Grizzle !

Why stand a-gaze ?

Take the sunshiny ways !

Quit the fog and the drizzle !

Break the split wand

And be done with the magic !

Know thyself truly,
Half-silly, half-tragic !
Only shown wholly
To the Lover we stand.

MERLIN. Something is stirring in the leaves, but
what

My old eyes grow too misty to make out.
I catch a sound of singing, but the words
Escape me. Alas ! the wisdom of the old
Is like a miser's hoard—laid up with toil 35
To lavish on a mistress—she being dead,
The old man counts his useless treasure over,
More joyless that it once had brought such joy.

*[Enter a rout of FAUNS, crowned with ivy and
vine leaves, and dancing and singing to the
sound of their tambourines. As they sing,
they make mops and mows at MERLIN.]*

FAUNS. Hear the crickets chirrup !
Jolly little fellows !
Summer's in the stirrup
In his reds and yellows.

The bumble-bee hangs over
The honey-hearted clover—
Lazy, drunken rover !

Buzz ! buzz ! buzz !

A FAUN. Foxes in the poultry-yard,
Making free with chickens !
Crows in the cornfield,
Pecking like the dickens !

[*Enter PAN and SATYRS, with Pan-pipes.*]

PAN. Pipe ! pipe !

For it's merry to live in the shade—
To lunch on the hillside under the trees,
To munch lush figs and oranges
And crunch fat pig-nuts; lying at ease,
Looking over the summer seas.

SATYRS. Pipe ! pipe !

For it's merry to live in the shade !

FAUNS *and* SATYRS [*softly, as PAN pipes*].

Hist ! list !

While the great god Pan pipes sweetly.

Whist ! all whist !

His fingers ripple featly

Over the oaten keys—

A noise as of many trees

And of all sweet sounds together,

Brooks that laugh in the intervalles,

Birds and bees in the dreaming dales,

The cool breeze whispering low *all-hails*

Over the sunlit heather

In the sleepy summer weather.

Hist ! hist !

[PAN *sits by the river, surrounded by SATYRS.*

*The FAUNS gather about MERLIN. The
scene becomes cloudier.]*

BASSARIDS [*without*].

On the height to-night—

Speed the news, speed the news !

Sting and smite

The wind with a tempest of shrill halloos !—

When the lynx is abroad and the red moon shines

Through the rents in the roof of the raftered pines,

And the black clouds rise from the muttering east

And the hot winds storm from the tremulous
south,

There shall be the pale foam of passionate faces
a-surge

With a sea-like iterant urge,
Round the fire and the feast,
And the red blood shall be smirched on the blood-
red mouth.

Halloo ! Halloo !

There's a feast afoot. ♀

The torrent howls like a hungry brute
And the owls shriek—Tu-whoo ! tu-whoo !

FAUNS [*about MERLIN*].

Tickle his ear !

Tickle his nose !

Hey, old wrinkle-face, isn't it queer ?

Sneeze, now—sneeze—ah !—there she goes !

[*Enter BASSARIDS, with cymbals, noisily. As they sing, BACCHUS appears in a car drawn by leopards. He is surrounded by MÆNADS, bearing beakers of wine.*]

BASSARIDS. Hark ! the lean wolf yelps !
And his eyes are red balls in the dark ;

And the whine of the she-bear's whelps

Wails on the wind—hark !

Hasten, Sun, to the dolphining west !

Speed, black Night, from the hooded east !

Bring to our nostrils the smell of the feast !

Bring the locks unbound and the limbs released

And the tigerish lover that bites the breast !

The torn red flesh and the beakers of blood !

And the riot and rush through the maddening
wood !

Hark ! the wolf ! U-lu-lo ! U-lu-lo !

BACCHUS. Wine, ho ! wine, ho !

Set the goblets ringing !

Clink, clink ! clink, clink !

Hail, the laughter-bringing !

Wine that makes the blood beat fast

And sets the senses tingling !

How the world goes reeling past

To the wine-cups jingling—

Reeling, wheeling round about,

In and out, to and fro !—

The trees spin with us in our rout

And leap as long ago—ho, ho !
And leap as long ago
They jigged it to Amphion's lyre—
Wine and Song have one desire.

MÆNADS. Wine, ho ! Clink, clink !
—The goblets chime.
Wine, ho ! Drink, drink !
So we conquer time.
Time lies drunk among the reeds,
Sleeping off his evil deeds.

BACCHUS. Let the future brood and bode
Let the past go spinning !
Pluck the roses by the road,
You'll find them worth the winning.
Let the tipsy days go by,
Take their gifts ! Let them go !
Laugh back at the laughing sky,
And when the storm-winds blow—ho, ho !
And when the storm-winds blow,
Outdin the thunder-throated skies
With tumult of your revelries ! 450

MÆNADS. Wine, ho ! wine, ho !
Through the veins a-laughing,
Like a sparkle on the flow
Of the upland brooks that go
Seaward wavering—swift, slow !
Wine, ho ! wine, ho !
The god pours out his life-blood so
That madmen may be quaffing.

[*The SATYRS, BASSARIDS, and FAUNS crowd
about BACCHUS and produce cups which
they fill from his exhaustless wine-skins.
The FAUNS drag MERLIN to the centre and
crown him with vine-leaves. The MÆ-
NADS caress him and ply him with wine.*]

MÆNADS. Come, old wherefore-seeker,
Let the Fates go flying !
See within the beaker
Joy imprisoned lying,
Like a sunbeam taken
In a roguish eye !
Drink ! let life awaken
And grave-mold wisdom die !

Thought is gray and life is green—
These are what men choose between.

FULL CHORUS. Wine, ho ! wine, ho !
See it foam and flash—yeo-heigh !
Wine, ho ! wine, ho !
Let the cymbals clash !
The deep hill-gorges
Buffet back our orgies.
The heart throbs quicker, quicker,
With a lightning-leap of mirth,
As the madness of the liquor
Turns the blood to flaming ichor
And makes music of the earth.
See the crags shake to and fro,
Toppling to the lake below !
Wine, ho ! wine, ho !
Yeo-heigh ! merrily, merrily.

A FAUN. Thy lips are teasing to be kissed.

A MÆNAD. Kiss me, then, but catch me first.

A SATYR. Love dries up my throat like thirst.
Let me clasp thee as I list !

A BASSARID. The swift fire slays me.

SATYR. Joy! she wavers.

Another FAUN. Leave us, goat-heels! She's for me.

BASSARID. Fight it out! We like to see
Battles for our favors.

FAUNS *and* SATYRS. The garments slipping in the
dance

Show here a breast and there a thigh.

BASSARIDS. The wild beast glares in every glance.

MÆNADS. There are shady coverts nigh.

[*Exeunt* FAUNS *and* SATYRS *tumultuously,*
chasing MÆNADS *and* BASSARIDS. BAC-
CHUS, *laughing,* *follows them leisurely in*
his car. MERLIN *attempts to follow, but*
falls tipsily. The scene lightens.]

PAN. O river rippling at my feet

Among the reeds and rushes!

O leaves that lisp applause to greet

The thrilling of the thrushes! *800*

Some prescience of the reedy life hushes the noisy
stream,

And whispering leaf to leaf, the listening bushes of
bird-songs dream. [Exit PAN.

ANGELS [*above, unseen*].

The Lord God is a God of the living.

To the works of His word

The Lord's heart is not chary of giving

The life-blood of the Lord.

Through the manifold forms of His moulding

It streams, and its working is rife,

Forever enfleshed and unfolding—

Life, life !

Though the beast rend his fellow asunder

And the hawk on the slain lark feeds,

He hath made them whose voice is the thunder

And He knoweth His deeds.

Without night were no dawn

And day were not known to be day.

But what eye understands ?

Who knoweth His way ?

Tiger and fawn

Alike are the work of His hands.

Yea, Darkness He maketh and Strife,
Who is Light and Love ;
And Death hath He wrought, who is Life ;
And Change, who sits changeless above.
But under the earth and the heaven
The arms that uphold them abide,
And Death shall be slain, say the Seven
That stand by His side.

[*A pause. Enter MAB and FAIRIES.*]

FAIRIES. With the pallid lunar dawn
Trip we forth from Avalon,
And our mirth
Ripples o'er the dreaming earth.
Over hill and valley dancing
Goes the tinkling of the beat
Of our many-twinkling feet
And the sound is as the glancing
Of moonlight on the lake.
Then when only watch-dogs wake,
Though the gates be kept and barred,
It goes hard

But we mock both bars and keepers,
And the sleepers
Rouse not for the silvery din
Of our noisy coming-in.

Or in the glen,
Far from the haunt of men,
Where the solemn owls protest
At our every light-heeled jest,
Like the stupid-wits they are,
 With a hoot,
 There our mischief is afoot, 330
And the twinkle of each star
Laughs back at us from afar.

[*A dance of FAIRIES.*]

MAB. Quick, fairies, to the river and scoop up
With shell-like hands a shower of watery pearls
To sprinkle on this ancient tippler here.

A FAIRY. What see I here? Am I so beautiful?
My Queen, look how the water glasses us.

[*The FAIRIES are absorbed in the contemplation
of their reflection in the water. Enter PUCK*

and GOBLINS; afterward OBERON, TITANIA, and the ELVES.]

GOBLINS. In the night,
Guided by uncertain torches
That affright
Luck-belated travellers,
We delight
To pass beyond the porches
Of the templed universe,
To explore with midnight lore
Secrets hidden from the sun—
To seek the many in the one—
Whether the elements be four
Or more—
How the rose blooms and grows,
With what blood its petal glows—
What meat doth it eat
In the eyeless underground.
Sure, some rare thing's to be found,
If we could but fathom it.
So we delve in doleful places
For its traces,
Where the dead lie inurned

And the paint rots from fair faces,
And the armor crumbles with rust,
And the body is returned
To its elemental dust.

PUCK. Ugk-gnn ! Ugk-gnn ! What a lugubrious chant !

You're not a whit better than so many frogs
That croak at eve in some o'ershadowed pool.
Why, what a mumbling is here of churchyards !
Bats' blood !

We're in Avalon now. Be a little gayer. Surely,
We haven't entirely forgotten to be merry.
For my part, I have small taste for skulls, unless
They be sawn across and mounted for drinking-cups.
Give me a pumpkin every time, with holes
For eyesockets and nostrils, and a candle
To make you think the Devil himself is in it.

[*The GOBLINS have begun suddenly to dig in the ground. Out of it they produce a shining metal.*]

GOBLINS. Lo, here ! Behold
What the earth doth hold !

Out of the clay
A brightness we bring,
Better than gold,
To the air and the day.
It is moonlight made ~~6m~~
A substantial thing—
A splendor laid
Under the dark mould,
By witless gnomes in the days of old.

*[As the GOBLINS throw the metal up out of the
earth, the ELVES take it and build of it a
bridge over the stream.]*

ELVES. We travel with a little pack
Of wonder-tools upon each back,
As light as any feather ;
We have a happy, handy knack
Of putting this and that together.

We spin the film of gossamer
The woodsman brushes from his face ;
We weave the cobweb's airy lace
No gust can rend, a breath may stir ;
We raise the mushroom's gay pavilion,

And duskier toadstools by the million ;
We contrive the chestnut-burrs,
Craftiest artificers.

One is nothing if another

Be not by to make it more :

Brother atom knows its brother :

Two and two are more than four.

Give us tools and give us stuff—

We'll make contrivances enough.

PUCK. Bah ! You play the sage detestably.

Now, here's one, lying by this trunk,

Proves his wisdom incontestably,

Getting sapiently drunk.

And in that condition, he perceives that marvelous structure you are so proud of, but as a thin line of light in the eastern sky, though it is already high noon. To the inspired vision of this bacchanalian wisdom here, everything is upside down, the trees gambol and pirouette, and the unintelligent ripples wink gravely and confidentially. He sees our heads where our heels are, and our heels where our heads are, our virtues as vices, and *vice versa*.

Rogues true and heroes scurvy—
So the world goes topsy-turvy.

TITANIA. Mocker of the elfin tribes,
Cease,
Prithee, thy ungentle gibes.
I will bring the man release.

Mortal, who with weak sight still
To discern the true art fain,
I alone have will and skill
To clear the cobwebs from the brain.

Let the perfume of this flower,
Stealing to the seat of sense,
Free the spirit from their power
By its holy influence. 65

And yet I know that thou wilt spin
Still subtler films when these be gone,
To wrap the vacant vision in
And dim the light of Avalon.

OBERON. Where's Ariel? His wand shall change
This structure that my elves have wrought,

To something far beyond their thought,
It is a miracle so strange.

PUCK. You never do a thing yourself.
But some poor devil of an elf
Is made through weary leagues to beat
His wings or run on restless feet,
While you lie dreaming in the wood,
Lapped in inactive lassitude,
Wrapped like Morgana in the mist—
Sometimes I think you don't exist.

OBERON. Whimsiest of the fairy brood,
I cannot scold you if I would.
But keep a rein on what you say ;
When I command, even you obey,
Who more than all delight to shirk.
I give the law, ye do the work.

[ARIEL *has appeared on the bridge, which is
completed.*]

ARIEL. Far away I heard your call,
Lord and master of us all.
By your wishing I was caught
In the shadow-land of thought,

Where the midnight and the day
Mingle in a twilight gray,
Through which wander here and there
Wondrous fantasies of air,
Throngs of thewless Anakim,
Cities half-discerned, and dim
With a rosy veil of mist
Spreading into amethyst.
There that golden country lies,
Sometimes seen of mortal eyes
As a vision in the skies.
Wretches in the desert straying
See its silver fountains playing,
Hasten forward to their slaying ;
For the hungry lion lies
Couched beneath the brazen skies,
And the vision faints and dies.
And the simple sailor flees
From the trancèd ships he sees,
Glamour of diableries.
But the graybeards smile and say,
“ Arthur’s sister, Morgan Fay,
Is in elfinland at play.

Trust her not, for she entices *her*.
Sagest wits with her devices.
Lo, this is not what it seems."
—Yet it ne'er could haunt their dreams,
If it did not somewhere stand
On the firm unshifting land.
Thence I come and thither go.
Master, what you will I know,
And I do your bidding—so !

[He touches the bridge with his wand. It is transfigured and becomes the rainbow-bridge, Bifrost, reaching from earth to heaven. The entire fairy rout march up and out of sight, singing.]

[Enter APHRODITE and the LOVES.]

LOVES. Dædal-throned, imperishable Aphrodite !
Child of Zeus, O thou of the many-colored
Spirit, crafty-hearted, devising twofold,
Slayer and saviour !

Who shall praise thee ? Who shall be found whose
fingers

Now may strike the Lesbian lute to greet thee
When thou leav'st the Paphian myrtle-coverts,
Yoking thy chariots

Lesbos-ward to cleave the dissolving ether ?
Only inarticulate wild sea-voices
Sound, O sea-born Love, where thy lost sweet singer
Drifts with the sea-tides.

Yet thy lips are sweet as of old with laughter,
Time grows gray, but still in thy golden tresses,
Sunlight lurks and loiters, thou Queen forever,
Deathless and ageless !

[*The VALKYRS appear, descending Bifrost.*]

VALKYRS. Ho, for the harrying
And havoc of battle !
The crush of the conflict !
The clashing of spears !
Ho, for the hero !

Many and mighty
The foemen that meet him,
A white-hot mass
Of hammered metal !

Weapon and warrior
Welded in the war-forgel
So they surround him,
But he, heavy-handed,
Hacking them dauntlessly,
Does them to death.

We from Valhalla
Hasten and hover
Over the war-valley,
Heartening the heroes.
Ho, for the strong man,
Stout-hearted in strife,
Overthrown but unthralled,
Overborne but unbroken,
Daring and doing,
Mighty of will!

LOVES. What strange goddesses these, slender,
with streaming hair, 750
Clean-limbed, vigorous, tall, fair as the pine is fair?
Lithe, strong, virginal forms treading with martial
gait
Down yon sevenfold arch, resolute, stern, elate?

Lo, their helmets upcast splendors that stream to
heaven,

Seven lights from the bridge, up from the helmets
seven !

Conquest sleeps in their eyes, victory binds their
brows,

Strength lies still on their lips, waiting till wars
arouse.

Whence and why do they come, halting before our
Queen ?

What have we for their wills, passionless and serene ?
Yet are they wondrous fair, fair in a sweet, strange
wise,

With the sunlight in their hair and the blue sky in
their eyes.

VALKYRS. Lo, the Goddess we seek !

The Queen from the South !

Lo, her delicate cheek !

Her adorable mouth !

Her eyes that are limpid with laughter, and sparkle
as springs never dried by a drouth !


O gentleness, bending

With royal reserve !

O queenliness blending
With languors that swerve
Down the sweep of the lines of imperial limbs, that,
stately and splendid of curve,
Rise poised like the calla,
Superb in its grace !
The gods in Valhalla,
O Queen, are a-gaze
With the rapture of rumors that reach them and rouse
them to look on the light of thy face !
Come, then, and o'er us
Thy radiance throw !
In the heart of our chorus
Let love lie aglow,
As the breath of the brief northern summer that
wakens the May-flowers under the snow.

APHRODITE. Maidens and gods and messengers
of gods,

I see you fair and goodly and made bright
With flashing armor and with floating hair.
Not otherwise of old I saw the queen,
Hippolyta, whom yet for all her spears
I made to follow where at first she fled,

Compelling to rebellious loyalty,
Subduing her proud will to Theseus' love,
Even as the smiling of the sun subdues.
For strength is good, but strength that knows not love
Is as a random archer in the dark,
And many shafts are shot whose flight is vain,
And some work evil. Yet not this alone—
Ye bring me gifts as I bring gifts to you.
Love without will and might of the strong arm 
Is bitterness and ashes of dead fruit.
Be my attendants, then ; I need your spears.

LOVES *and* VALKYRS. Throw open your arms, O
Valhalla !

Cry out and rejoice !
For she comes with the sunlit hair
And the face divinely fair,
And the brook-soft voice ;
And a whisper of lutes is heard,
The rustle of unborn leaves in the air
And the song of an unseen bird.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And the Queen of Love shall come in,

With the steel of the north in her hand
And the heart of the south within ;
And the snow shall melt from the frozen land,
And the summer leaves be green.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And the Queen of Love shall come in !

[Exeunt, singing, over the bridge Bifrost.]

[Enter ARGENTE and eight MAIDENS, crowned with wreaths and carrying garlands in their hands.]

MAIDENS. Rosebuds and apple-blossoms !

Fairer than they seem !

In our hair and in our bosoms

Lying in a dream !

Living and dreaming—

Visionless and mute—

Underneath their simple seeming

Lurketh flower and fruit.

Denying and averring

As yet they do not know—

Only an unconscious stirring

Where the thought shall grow.

Dreams of joy and sweetness
Fill each rosy leaf,
And the yearning for completeness
Is a dream of grief.

Wise without intellection,
Dreaming toward their fate,
Perfect in their imperfection,
Let them wait—
Let them wait.

MERLIN. If that thou be a spirit, or a dream,
Or but a wonder of sweet maidenhood,
I know not. But, I pray thee, maid or dream
Or spirit, be as gracious as thy looks.
I am a man much worn with years and sorrows.
Hither have I come I know not how, and where
I am I know not. Guide me hence, I pray,
—Or, since thou seemest attended as a queen,
Bid one of these thy servants go with me
And set my feet upon some way that leads
To many-towered Camelot. There I dwell ~~to~~
And serve King Arthur, counselling his reign.

ARGENTE. Thou sayest ; I am a queen. But I
reign not in the fashion that thou deemest ;
Neither are these servants, but my kinswomen, among
whom I am crowned by love only,
Service with service exchanging, their least with my
most counted equal.
One, not unknown to thee, Merlin, is near, the ninth
of my maidens,
And she, when she cometh, shall conduct thee
whithersoever thou wilt. The way is
Not long to the battlements of Camelot, though long
from Camelot hither.

MERLIN. I know not how thou knowest my name,
and yet
With many marvels I am so distraught
That I no longer gape at anything.
Who art thou, lady, and what place is this ?

ARGENTE. I am the Lady of the Lake, and this is
the valley of Avalon.
The violets of spring and the roses of summer and
the fruitage of autumn

Here burgeon together, and the North here mingles
with the South and is lost in it
As a lover is that lingers in the arms of his mistress
till he swoons and is one with her.
Once hitherto hast thou seen me, O Merlin, when
Nimue the water-witch
Sent thee with Arthur to the lake-shore, for a gift
that should gain him his kingdom ;
And there clave through the sheen of the shield that
the lake holds up to the heaven
An arm for the boss of it that bare the great brand,
Excalibur, and brandished it ;
And Arthur with a cry sprang down to the shore
where a light skiff lay for his using
And leaped to the oars, and the boat shot forward
like the darting of a kingfisher,
Swift-sent by the urge of his eagerness out into the
serene fire-splendor,
Till it stopped in the centre a-quiver as an arrow is
that strikes in a target.
Then from my hands he received it.—But lo, she
comes—Nimue !

[*Enter* NIMUE.]

Hail, sister !

NIMUE. Hail, my Queen !

MERLIN. What, the beautiful Nimue !

NIMUE. Welcome to Avalon, Master !

MERLIN. O lady, I should rather do
Thee reverence. Alas, what kingship sits
In these gray hairs? Master? The child treads
firmlier *in*
Over rough ways ; but I, the seer, am blind
And grope and stumble like a man in the dark.

NIMUE. Ay, but if thou stumblest in paths where
another would perish—!
Blind? Rather say keen-eyed as the hunter that
follows
The fleet-foot goat on the mountain, till, lost in the
cloud-mist,
Sheer at his feet gulfs gaping, he stops in amazement,
Dizzy and doubting—but another had never dared
climb there.

MERLIN. Thy words are like a wood-brook in my ears.

But, gentle lady, I am sick at heart :
Increase of knowledge increaseth mysteries ;
And, knowing much, I know that I know nothing.

NIMUE. Yet something I hold it, being man, to
put question as thou
To the gods, though the gods render answer in
riddles.

MERLIN. Ah, me !
Too well I know the bridgeless vast between
The most high gods and men. Let but these
limbs
Be once more lithe and tense, and so endure—
These smouldering eyes flame with immortal fire—
What do I say?—Make the soul young again
To tread with step perennially light
The ways of thought and passion, and o'erleap
The hedges and the dykes of circumstance—
There were the god-like! — then I might dare
think . . .
Of what is less than a day-defeated dream.

NIMUE. Why breakest thou so suddenly off, too
modest?

Dreams are from God. So oft is an oracle spoken.

MERLIN. Thy words are as a lure to the fatal
springe

Of mine own folly. Nimue, Nimue! . . .

First time I saw thee, 't was in a frail skiff

Among the water-lilies of the lake—

Standing upright, borne on without wind or oar,

As if the spirit of the flowers had risen

Over them in a mist and, floating there,

Rounded at last to definite shape—in thee.

Since then at night I have seen thee by my bed

And in the day—But I have not been a fool.

Mere man am I and weak with years, nor choose,


Leaping at godhood, to fall back to earth,

Crippled and bleeding.

NIMUE. Manhood is godhood in germ—

Aught less is brutishness. Anywise, whoso would
win,

Be it godhood or devilhood, must leap.

MERLIN. I have talked face to face
With gods and demons, and have dared to seek
The awful cavern of the Norns and held
Strange questionings with them ; yet none the less
I know myself—mere man. Not mine to hope
Youth and the goal, the joy of mastership, 
The poise of achievement—these are for the gods.

ARGENTE. Thou camest from Hecla hither ?

MERLIN. Ay, but by some strange route I know
not of.

NIMUE. Dark riddles speak they, the sullen-mut-
tering Norns.

Why wouldst thou scan their searchless mysteries ?

ARGENTE. Concerning what didst thou demand
of them ?

MERLIN. Of Arthur and the maiden, Guenevere.

ARGENTE. Seeks Arthur, then, a queen ?

MERLIN. He would be wed.

ARGENTE. Beware lest he find a queen, but not a
wife !

Let him not marry her, Merlin !

Ah, woe ! I see a great woe in the land.

MERLIN. Shall all his might be lost with which he
strove,
Building the mightiest throne in the round world,
The noblest—for failure of a hand to keep
His conquests ? For a child is as ourselves,
Renewed, corrected, wiser for our lives,
Achieving wholly where we partly failed.

ARGENTE. With much devising we shall change
no whit
What God shall do with that which we have done.

MERLIN. What, shall our labors fail ?

ARGENTE. The kingdom shall pass utterly.
But he, the king, shall wear a greater crown.

MERLIN. Knowing all this, why questionest thou
me ?

ARGENTE. Yon world of days and nights where
Arthur lives,
I know but as thou knowest.

MERLIN. Over it they rule,
The Norns, the unfaltering.
Why keepest thou me here, then,
With empty words ?

ARGENTE. O weak in wisdom !
Knowest thou not, then, that here
Thou, too, wert born.
Camelot ? The world ? A dream,
Wherein thou movest about
Amid thin apparitions !

NIMUE. Here, here, O Merlin,
Delights await thee,
Soft lips that smite and sweet hands that kiss,
Love that decays not,
Joy that delays not,
Thought that grows thing
Without groaning, a gladsome travailing.

MERLIN. O subtly fair and beautifully wise,
With what device wouldst thou ensnare my mind ?

ARGENTE. Understandest thou not ?
Thou, who art subtle beyond thought !

NIMUE. O slow of faith !
Lo, I invite thee
Out of the shadows
To the firm and the free.

ARGENTE. I charge thee, as thou wouldst avert
great woe,
Let not the king take Guenevere to wife.

MERLIN. Wouldst thou be mightier than the
Norns ?

ARGENTE. Over the beginnings
They have no power.
Theirs but to conclude.

MERLIN. Who shall persuade their wills ?
Who shall unspeak their words ?

ARGENTE. Even thou understandest not as yet
their speech.

MERLIN. A brittle anchor is thought ;
But the storm bellows and ramps and the gods in
heaven are earless.
Weak as it is, I cast it out to the tide.

NIMUE. Yet are there winds that blow to a secure
haven.

ARGENTE. Wilt thou trust the hope of the world
to a slender cord ?

MERLIN. Nay, what seems best to my divided
soul,
That must I do, let it be well or ill.

ARGENTE. Ai, ai !
The fate of the king, the grandly-defeated !
For over many ways he toils, with hope
High-set, to find a darkness and a chasm.

MERLIN. What ill is this, whereof she prophe-
sies ?

ARGENTE. Woe, woe !
The dream of the new earth
Is broken and shattered.
It drives before the wind
As torn clouds after the spent storm.

MERLIN. What shall endure ? For, although one
should build

Upon a rock, there is the earthquake. Ay,
The earth itself shall be cast as straw in the
fire,
And there shall none know where in the trackless
gulfs
Of interstellar darkness, thundering,
It charioted once its swift predestined way.

ARGENTE. Ah me !
A blessed lot is the lily's in the lake,
That waits the rounding of its circled life
Without the sense of unfulfilled desire.

MAIDENS. Comfort thee, O our Queen !
The best is yet unseen.

Even we, as the earth-born,
See not the very end
To which our footsteps tend,
Through tears and mirth borne.

This use may lie in sorrow,—
To drive the soul to strive and strain,
Building its vast and sunsetless to-morrow,
To escape to-day's intolerable pain.

If to all grief a sweet surcease were given,
How should the spirit unfold to larger scope?
Why should we strive for heaven,
If earth fulfilled our hope?

[ARGENTE *and the maidens have withdrawn a
little space.*]

MERLIN. O Nimue, had it been but possible,
That thou an earthly maiden, I a lad,
With nought to know or to forbode beyond
The thoughts that stir the thrushes in the co-
verts——!

O Age! what better boon hast thou to bring
Than love and song? But Arthur waits for me,
And what should I, an old man, have to do
With dreams of a completion for myself
Who daily weaken toward the undoing of all
The half-wrought in me—death. Elsewhere I look
To find the fruit grown ripe that fell in me,
Blasted in flower-time. Arthur waits for us.

NIMUE. Be it so, then. I summon my ministers.
—Ho!

Arise, ye that turmoil beneath there!—Yet once
again

I shall pass from thy sight as the violet light on the
sea

When the sun sinks into a cloud.—Arise, ye starve-
lings!—

But, oh, my master and lord!

Thou shalt hear in the teasing of leaves stirred by
the wind,

In the lisp of the lake through the reeds and the
swan's harsh cry,

Made strangely, mournfully sweet in the cool and the
dusk

As it comes from afar o'er the waters, a message of
me;

For I wait for thee—there in the reeds!

As a glen in the woodland waits, with the touch of
the sun

Slant-struck through the leaves on the brook and the
grasses (a throstle

A-lilt in the bush), till the man, world-weary, ap-
pearing,

Worn with contention and evil, rests in her arms,

And his fever is cooled and his limbs wax youthful
and strong,
And the sin is cleansed from his soul and the mist
from his eyes,
And the bird in his heart wakes, singing of love and
peace.—

Arise, I say, monsters !

Arise ! Earth waits and the carrion of earth !

Hunger ye not ?

*[The ground opens and flames appear. Through
the opening a car rises, drawn by dragons.
NIMUE enters the car and extends her
hand to MERLIN who follows her. The car
rises into the air and disappears in the dis-
tance.]*

ARGENTE. With grinning jaws
They gape horribly,
Bearing him back where body and soul
Gnaw juiceless bones continually.
Jag-toothed dragons, shutting and opening your
eyes
With hideous slowness !

In my soul, too, is a hunger.

Ai, ai !

The bite of the tooth in flesh that cannot waste !

MAIDENS. Comfort thee, O our Queen !

Sorrow is dear to the wise,

Who know that Love is leading,

And believe—for have they not seen ?

Mystery of mysteries !

The crowned brow is bleeding.

ARGENTE. Alas, my sisters ! you are good to me.

Your presence is as starlight to my spirit.

Your words are as a bird's song in the trees

When all the woodland sorrows under clouds.

I know the end is sweet—I see it plain,

As the jay yonder the bough to which it flies.

But oh, the way is long and the heart weak !

Is the physician's wound less sore

Because his cunning knows that it will heal ?

The fallen warrior

With the broken shaft of the spear driven as a nail

Through muscle, sinew, bone, lung, heart—

Feels he not, though Valhalla open

And the Valkyrs wait with cup and crown,
Sharp anguish, intolerable gaspings that pierce
Each with keen torture the frayed nerves, killing him
A hundred times for once ?

Ai, ai !

It is not all a good to see the things
That shall be. He that will soar to topmost heaven,
Must plunge, too, down to the voiceless lowest of
hell.

Ye shall not know the good without the evil,
Saith the Lord God.

Ai, ai ! I see the maiden stand in the choir.
The royal robes are girt upon her. Priests
And choristers intone monotonously.
The sunlight falling bloodily through the panes,
Is dim and thick with incense. The King comes !
I see him take her fatal hand in his.

Aïe ! The breath of the god
Tingles on my forehead !
My flesh quivers with its power !
The dread that hung over me sunders as a cloud.
A sunlit garden—lay this behind the gloom ?
And he—is he my fear ?

Beautiful as Balder he stands by the beautiful queen,
High-thoughted, kingly as a cedar.

From the high hills the woe cometh,

A desolating avalanche !

The scabbard, Arthur !

Quick ! The intriguing fingers close on it.

Awake ! The sword itself is less precious. Ah ! .

Woe ! woe !

The stark bodies of the slain !—

Spare me, Spirit that overbroods me !

I endure not the vision !

I am slain with intense whirling of tumultuous life !

Back, bodeful clouds ! Once again, as with inrolling
waters,

Engulf the insufferable sight !

Aïe !

The din of shields and the shouts of the warriors !

The death-birds hovering afar off !

Where is he, my king, my beloved ?

Over the sea-like sparkle of shields I seek him—in
vain.

Ah, ah !

There, in the crest of the war-surf—

Arthur, Arthur !

He struggles toward the treacherous chief. Their
swords clash.

O valiant prince ! O misbegotten traitor ! . . .

He falls—the King ! the King !

*[She falls back exhausted and is surrounded by
her maidens, screening her from sight.]*

MAIDENS. Comfort thee, O our Queen !

Through warring and woe

The man and the woman

Build heaven for themselves.

From the deeps where it delves

Uplifted, the human

Soars to the divine,

Though the void intervene.

Pierce through the veils and lo,

The sevenfold light of the shrine !

[Exeunt slowly, singing.]

ANGELS [*above.*] Holy ! holy ! holy !

Which wert and which art and which shalt be,

World without end ! Alleluia !

In Thyself is the end
And the cause of Thy being,
O Thou beyond name !
In the mystery of Thy seeing,
The eye and the vision blend.
'Mid the shifting and fleeing
Thou abidest the same.

Death and birth
Are the garment of Thee !
The seed and the bud ;—
But ere these is the thought of a tree.
Behold, the bread of the earth
And the wine of the sea
Are Thy body and blood.

Love, which is light,
Brings to earth the far sun.
Love, which is life,
Is as blood through Thy body to run.
Love, which is spirit, shall smite
Thought and thing into one,
As a man and a wife.

Holy! holy! holy!

Which art in all and through all and beyond all!

Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!

[The entire scene melts away into a glory of intense light, because of the brightness of which the flight of the ANGELS is seen but dimly as they pass through it.]

ANGELS. Down, down!

Into the gulfs of night

Between the worlds!

God also is there.

Down, down!

Into the caverns of space,

Where the great dark winds fare

From star to star!

Leaving his light,

Still towards him is our flight.

There in the dragon dark's embrace,

As here, as here, we look upon his face.

[The light changes to darkness. Mid-aether.

MERLIN and NIMUE, in the chariot of dragons, accompanied by the ANGELS

*Nought else is seen in space but the
distant stars.]*

MERLIN. What flames are these? Lines of white
following fire,
Half human and half meteor ! Their light
Is as the swift aurora in the north.

ANGELS. Dark, dark !
Dark is noon to the blind.
Follow and find !
Follow and find !
Hark, hark !
The noise of a rushing wind !
But thou knowest not whence it blows
Nor whither it goes.

MERLIN. Torment me not, ye fair derisive glories !
With much inquiring I lose heart to seek.

ANGELS. Close the eyes of the mind
And open the eyes of the soul !
Seek no more
By sea or sky or shore
To overtake the Eternal nor unbind
The irrevocable scroll.
Seek and the sought eludes ;

Strive and the prize retires;
Cities and solitudes,
Night and the griffon woods,
Passions and wild desires,
And the far fires
Of the immeasurable sky —
What secret shall they tell
The dividing eye?
Death and a shell.
Break Leviathan as a colt,
And Behemoth as a foal;
Put thy yoke on the thunderbolt,
And use him for thy mirth;
Curb and control
The engirdled earth!
Art thou nearer the goal?

Put a bit in the teeth of the storm,
And a noose on the neck of the sea;
Say to ice, "Thou shalt keep me warm,"
And to air, "Be a bridge for me;"
What hast thou gained for thy toil
But a vaster gulf for prayer?

Thy bread and wine and oil,
And still the darkness there?

Thou shalt measure the stars;
Orion and the Pleiades
Shall send thee embassies;
Thou shalt chart the cities of Mars;
Thou shalt sift Aldebaran
As gold dust in the pan;
Algol shall undusk
For thee his demon trouble; . . .
In vain! All is husk,
To be cast out with the stubble.

Great is the mind that wills
And the law that fulfils;
But greater the hour that sounds.
Beyond all striving
And slow contriving,
Over the unrelaxing hold
Of consequence and Time,
That which was written from of old
Confounds
And subjugates to its own wilful tune

Alike man's doubtful rune
And the world's answering rhyme,

MERLIN. Alas, then, what avail the labor of man?
And whither shall he turn, then, to be wise?

ANGELS. Thou hast been with the Norns, with the
Finishers;
With the spirits of Avalon, the Origins.
Hearken now to the voice of the void,
The rumor of the dark,
The wisdom of silence!

There is a Fate that overthroweth the Finishers;
There is a Will that is earlier than the Origins.

Or ever the child is quick
In the womb of its mother, —
One for the battle's thick,
Peace for another.
Or ever the heart were stirred
In the breast of the sire,
Or ever his eyes were a word
Of delight and desire,
One for the scourge and scars,

And one for a dull routine,
And one to dazzle the stars
And make Time his demesne.

The lifting of a lid,
The stirring of a breeze,
In these
The Destinies are hid.
Why thou shouldst turn and look
Thither to-day
And not another way,
Is a sealed book;
But in that glance
Slow life becomes a spirit-stirring dance.

Before all things
Listen for the beat of the unseen wings;
Whither they lead,
By hill or hollow.
Palace or mead,
There shalt thou follow.
Whither they lure,
Be not afraid;
Thy path is waylaid,

Ambushed with aid,
To hesitance obscure,
But to the dare secure ;
And the universe conspires
With thy desires.

So, when all plans are laid
And laid in vain,
So, though all debts be paid
And paid again,
In its own despite
And in the teeth of right
The soul shall be betrayed
To its domain.

And the kingdom of one is joy,
And the kingdom of one is tears ;
One for a dull annoy,
And one for a sea of cheers !
Each to his own,
Whatever the road he take ;
This one to sit on a throne,
And that one to stand at the stake !

NIMUE. Hearken to them, O Merlin! Woman in
me
Makes my divinity bow and acknowledge their
speech.

Wise are the Norns, and wiser and earlier we;
Truth spake the Norns, but truth is not one but
three;
Deeper and wiser the truth that these flame-fashioned
teach.

MERLIN. Speak, ye; and I am silence and abased.
ANGELS. What thou canst divine,
That is thine, is thine.

*[Three forms, like unto the ANGELS, appear in
space; and on the forehead of each gleams
a star.]*

THE STAR OF ARTHUR. I am the star
Of Arthur, a meteor
Of might and war.
Under my influence armies spring
Like grass along the trail of spring.
Crowns and dominions in my hand,
With heel upon the Snake I stand

And, sweet and strong as death, I wear
The hearts of all men in my hair.
But ne'er shall he, the knight of peace,
His world from wicd of war release
Nor throne irrevocable his dream,
(Save for the poet's lofty theme,)
His high resolve for human good,
World-empire of world-brotherhood.

I bear no boon in my control
Of face to face and soul to soul.
His power is over nations placed ;
His fate for multitudes is traced.
In closer joys and privier ties
For him no weal nor safety lies.
Friendship most faithful can but be
A perilous infidelity ;
Marriage shall be a matter planned,
Heart shall withhold to go with hand ;
Love shall awake to find its kiss
A fatal and incestuous bliss ;
And at the end his life shall bleed
Beneath the stroke of his own seed.

THE STAR OF LAUNCELOT. I am the star of
Launcelot.

My splendor would be without blot
But that one nobleness shall smite
Another and make blessing blight.
Whose life I am torch-bearer for,
Supreme in love, supreme in war,
No foe shall vanquish in the fray
Nor ill hap snatch success away.
Loves that he would not, come to woo;
He has one love and that love true.
And the whole world waits for his eye
Its royal will to signify.

But in his heart eternal jar,
Two loves, two loyalties at war,
Love without peer and peerless friend,
And each by each debarred and banned,
The joy of hearts a brand and thong,
And truth to each the other's wrong.

Yet in that bitter strife within
As in the outer battle's din,

Victor where'er his fate be cast,
The triumph shall be his at last;
Though far the port and fierce the gale,
He shall prevail, he shall prevail;
Dauntless in doubt and undismayed,
Whom his own soul makes not afraid,
Faltering between the dark and day,
He shall not miss his dubious way,
And though his seeming twist and bend,
Shall keep his soul true to the end.

THE STAR OF GUENEVERE. I am the star of
Guenevere,

A regnant and a rebel sphere,
A light to make the years grow dim
And Time's eyes like a lover's swim,
Heavened highest in the skies of song,
And dowered with love's ancient wrong.

She for whom burns my beacon-light,
Shall have the wonder of the night
For beauty, and for soul's desire
The passion of the solar fire.

A bitter crown shall be her fate;
And yet her joy shall be more great.
She shall be branded with men's blame,
And for the glory wear the shame,
Yet keep her spotless passion white
Forever in all true men's sight.
Though never far destruction threat,
She shall elude its malice yet,
Pass through all perils without scaith
And pluck the beard of palsied death.

The lordliest love-light of the years
Is Guenevere's, is Guenevere's.
Her sorrow shall be made a stair
To enter Eden unaware;
Her joy shall be a golden road
Through woodlands of divine abode.
She shall for every bruise have balm,
Win through love's tempest to love's calm,
Trample the dragon, world's-repute,
Under her fair victorious foot,
Make good love's cause for loves unborn,
And leave a name beyond Time's scorn,

That Love may shrine and Song revere
The memory of Guenevere.

[They vanish, suddenly, with the ANGELS.]

NIMUE. Thou, too, O Merlin,
Follow thy star.

MERLIN. I follow thee.

[The chariot passes from sight.]

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